

Ms. Bijaylaxmi Mohapatra

Research Scholar, KIIT School of Humanities,

KIIT Deemed to be University,

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India.

shivagouri1982@gmail.com

Raising the voice against the patriarchal monopoly: Reflecting on the evolution of
Ecofeminism in the Post-Colonial era.

Abstract: This paper based on the evolution of a post-colonial theory ‘ecofeminism’, that goes hand in hand with the environmental movements led by the women leaders. Ecofeminism speaks about how the marginalisation of womanhood is directly proportional to ecological devastation. No doubt, development has brought well-being and affluence for the third world, but it has also brought environmental degradation and forced poverty in most of the regions of the world. Thus, it is crucial to resuscitate and nurture the impulse and determination to survive. Ecofeminism talks about the fundamental necessities of life by voicing against the commercialisation of both women and nature by the male dominance and how the regenerative power of both is manipulated on the profit and loss game. This paper explores various thoughts of both feminists and environmental philosophers about ecofeminism and how the chance of peace on the Earth can only be achieved by recognising the ‘web of domination’. This present paper pursues to sketch the evolution of postcolonial Ecofeminism which has tried to give voice to the unvoiced nature as well as women. This paper also analyses how both western and Indian English writers have tried to bring awareness about the ecological disaster that mostly effect the women, children and the marginalised people of the third world.

Key words: - Ecofeminism, Post -colonial Ecofeminism, Modernity, Gender stereotypes, capitalism, Indian literature, Environmental movements.

1. Introduction

“The intimate relationship between human life and living nature became the source of knowledge. Nature was not dead and inert in this knowledge system. The experience of life in the forest made it adequately that living nature was the source of light and air, of food and water.”

[Rabindranath Tagore, Tapovan (Hindi)]

The mother earth provides equal opportunities to all her species for growth and development. But the quantum of human needs is more and it is the first reason for the disproportion factor on earth. When the term human comes, it is categorized into man and woman. The former perceives earth as a part of his domain, whereas the latter thinks ‘herself’ as a part of nature. This thought develops into theory and then into action. Consequently, man is framed as masculine and women as feminine. As if the world moved on and separated on two bases, one is the ‘Oppressor’ and other one is the ‘Oppressed’. Even from modern science to modern literature, the story of the oppressor and the oppressed is quite prevalent. No doubt, development has brought well-being and affluence for the third world, but it has also carried with environmental degradation and poverty in most of the regions of the world. It is true that the horizon of developmental perspective of human is expanding day by day but it is at the cost of degradation of the mother earth, which cannot be restored. The unconditional desire for development of the oppressor has created the incredible inventions by twisting and moulding the earth, even if there is awareness of the fact that all these actions directly or indirectly lead to endangering our eco system and lives.

Addressing the issues of ecological crisis, Vandana Shiva states, “You are not Atlas carrying the world on your shoulder. It is good to remember that the planet is carrying you.” The emerging artificial developmental attitude has brought a gigantic threat to life on planet earth. Thus, it is crucial to resuscitate and nurture the impulse and determination to survive. Shiva has protested her voice against the rapid move of capitalist approach of danger and crisis towards the nature and women. The feminist led environmental movements stepped in the past few decades acknowledges the fact that capitalist monarchy has disturbed the ecology and the life style of women mostly. While discussing about the Chipko Movement (1973) took place in India by the women leaders, and also considered as one of the most important eco-socialism movements, Vandana Shiva uttered, “We are either going to have a future where women lead the way to make peace with the Earth or we are not going to have a human future at all.” These discussions point out towards the interlink between ecological sustainability and feminism which often termed as Ecological feminism or Ecofeminism. Today, wherever our eye reaches, we see the dismantled Earth. Almost 80% of the forests are destroyed and it is most obviously decreasing day by day. The most important thing that the nature is conceptualised as feminine and this may be the cause of the extension of barbaric attitude that man has possessed towards the nature. The land has been excavated, the rivers are dried up, the forests are destroyed and the earth has been left to feel her last breath.

Is it true that men found the earth as voiceless like women? Do men not need the nature to survive? If yes, then why this brutal behaviour shown towards nature? For men, nature and women are mere resources, meant to be exploited for the personal cause. The set-up perception of man verses culture, women verses nature has assigned the patriarchal mind in accepting that he is the master of both and hence both can be twisted, moulded and broken. The masculine ego then named as ‘Development’. The capitalist exposition and the flow of colonisation cooked the ingredients of ecology to prepare the dish of wealth, status, luxury and power.

Development has brought an untimely death of natural forests, water, soil and air that knowing affected both human and non-human. The modern capitalist mindset grabbed the human need of agriculture and replaced it with either profit based organic farming or value-based products. As a result, women are left away from the larger economic activities and assigned with the daily chores that create no economic opportunities. Warren argued that the technological method of agriculture, uses of tree, water consumption, farming practices, production of food, ultimately create toxins and yes it a feminist issue. She claimed again the deforestation created interruption in the lives of women more than men, as they are more dependent on the products of forest for fuel, food, fodder, building tools for home, medicines and above all the hope of economic support. The ecological crisis ultimately shaped the crisis in the lives of women. This crisis is across every culture, or else it is termed as crisis cross culturally. By following same technological progress and industrial growth, patriarchal ideology renamed 'development' as 'catching up development', which is setup for 'good life'. This myth is strongly criticized by Maria Mies in 'The Myth of Catching -up Development'. She stated that in the race of getting 'good life' the colonised have to accept the standard of living, values and above all the life styles of 'those on top'. Colonizers' act of development is being accepted as a mode of opportunities by men of the land, whereas women stuck in between family and household stuff. The political engagement with capitalism devalued the unpaid women who spend their whole life after house hold stuff and family affairs. The patriarchal society having the most abstract thinking view women and nature as voiceless and valueless. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) depicts the good-bye of culture from the nature providing a name of 'Scientific Revolution', where Bacon and Descartes view nature as a 'machine'. This 'machine' is meant to be experimented, analysed and the oppression of nature started considering as a 'Judicious use of resources'. Culturally, women are compared with nature who are supposed to produce the masculine seed. The cultural domination named

both nature and women as 'other' who possess lesser value as depicted by Karen Warren in 'Feminism and Ecology: Making Connections', *Environmental Ethics* (1987). However, the critics of feminist movement started realising the common issues in between women suppression and ecological devastation, particularly in the Third world countries. The awareness about the evolution of women and nature is stated in Ruether's *New Woman New Earth* as "Women must see that there can be no liberation for them and no solution to ecological crisis within a society whose fundamental model of relationships continues to be one of domination" (Ruether 1975).

2.0. Evolution of Ecofeminism:

The more radical ecological crisis felt by the women of the society and their voice raised for the sake of 'survival' and hence they casted the handful of revolutionary seeds across the cultures. Ecofeminism was started as an activism and academical movement which revealed the interconnection between the mistreatment of nature and women by the same patriarchal and exploitive institutions and customs. While feministic approach deals with the liberation of women from the domination of male, certainly one can't deny the fact that the natural world is also degraded by the same rapid progress operated by men only. Patrick D. Murphy, a in central Florida stated,

'To be a feminist, one must also be an ecologist, because the domination and oppression of women and nature are inextricably intertwined. To be an ecologist, one must also be a feminist, since without addressing gender oppression and the patriarchal ideology that generates the sexual metaphors of masculine domination of nature, one cannot effectively challenge the world views that threaten the stable evolution of the biosphere in which human beings participate or perish.'

(*'Ecofeminist Literary Criticism'*, co-edited with Greta Gaard)

Ecofeminists believe in the collaboration of feminism and environmental issues that can be one of the best possible ways to cover an extensive series of issues connected to ecosystem. In supporting Patrick D. Murphy, Deborah Slicer extends her opinion that

‘In order to be feminist, an environmental philosophy must, at the very least, Acknowledge, condemn, and expunge androcentrism from its own critical analyses and revisionary theories and incorporate analyses of other oppressed peoples into their analysis of oppressed nature’.

(Slicer, Deborah “Wrongs of Passage: Three Challenges to the Maturing of Ecofeminism.” Ecological Feminism.1994)

Ecofeminism successfully revealed the twin domination, keeping an aim of dual freedom of nature as well as women from the pangs of patriarchy. Though the term ‘Ecofeminism’ was devised by French writer Françoise in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974) but it took its original flavour through numerous feminists, ecological and social movements. Gradually, in 1990’s literature department in the United States included ecofeminism as an earth centred approach to literature studies. The critics of ecofeminism had the argument that the supremacy over women by the traditional male centred approach are resonated in patriarchal practices and address with respect to the environment. Sherry B. Ortner points in *Male as Nature is to Culture?* That both nature and women are often related with the cultural metaphor. Socialist ecofeminism criticises the masculine mode of transformation of nature which has twisted and turned the mother earth for the never-ending luxury and desire. The soil, air, water, land and jungles are not considered as the life-giving entities rather for man, these are the means of profit. Ecofeminism exposes how the regenerative power of both nature and women are manipulated on the profit and loss game. Ecofeminists has brought similarities between the reductionist science on nature and the reproductive medical technologies on women, where

both are considered as 'raw materials' from where 'products' are extracted. Man sees the outcomes, the development and the change that he has brought by using the mighty power against nature.

In every civilisation, women are the worst target due to the ecological devastation, especially in this "third world" as their lives are unpleasantly exaggerated by the forces of corporate globalization and colonialism. As a woman plays vital roles in the process of food security, managing eco system and sustainable energy, thus it is she who only can play a dynamic role in creating a consciousness in saving the mother earth and implementing the same too.

Gradually, ecological movements were publicized all over the world for the survival of life on earth, such as the Chipko Movement in India, the dumping of dangerous wastes in US, the Anti-Militarist movement in Europe, in Kenya the Green belt movement etc. All these movements are termed as Eco-feminist movements as these were led by women. It was the real power of women leaders in Chipko Movement, which forced the then government to declare a fifteen-year moratorium on logging in the Himalayan forests in Uttar Pradesh. Chipko Movement dismantled the age-old myth that holds the ideas that movements are carry forwarded by the outside leaders only. Shiva detailed in her essay, The Chipko Women's Concept of Freedom:

'The myth that movements are created and sustained by charismatic leaders from outside is shattered by the non-violent struggle in Nahi-Kala in which ordinary women like Itwari Devi and Chamundeyi have provided leadership through extraordinary strength .It is the invisible strength of women like them that is the source of the staying power of Chipko – a movement whose activities in its two decades of evolution have been extended from embracing trees to embracing living mountains and living waters. Each new phase of Chipko is created by invisible women.'

(Vandana Shiva, The Chipko Women's Concept of Freedom, Ecofeminism)

The very idea again supported by Susan Griffin , a renowned radical feminist and one of the pioneer of ecofeminism , who strongly believes that women is very closely related to the nature or environment. In her text, 'Women and nature, The Roaring inside Her', she developed the idea about the interlinkage between women and nature in such words: -

'He says that woman speaks with nature. That she hears voices from under the earth. That wind blows in her ears and trees whisper to her. That the dead sing through her mouth and the cries of infants are clear to her. But for him this dialogue is over. He says he is not part of this world that he was set on this world as a stranger. He sets himself apart from woman and nature ...'

(Susan Griffin, Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her)

Besides, reclaiming the female body and her unconditional association with the nature, Ecofeminism also recoups the identity of non-human nature extending the idea of nature verses culture dualism.

3.0. Feminism in Ecofeminism:

Feminism as a theory and practice has started its journey since women had first began raising their voices for justice and equal rights. Feminist scholars like Jane Addams, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Simone de Beauvoir have tremendously contributed in developing women status in the social periphery. Though, the feminist criticism began in late 1960, its foundation had been laid in 18th century, when the British proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft published her book, A Vindication to the rights of women. It is counted as one of the earliest theoretical works in Feminist Philosophy. Wollstonecraft projected about the education of women in the society as they can be the co-companion with their husband. However, the productive and creative possibilities of women in the patriarchal society was challenged in A Room of One's Own, an extended essay by Virginia Woolf. Feminist theory came into forefront due to the in-equality and injustice found in the then patriarchal society.

In reality, the representation of the two sexes is not similar in the actual sense. Man was represented as positive and neutral, which are the general characteristics given to man to label human beings; whereas woman was represented only as negative. Feminism talks about equality and freedom in every sector that a human deserves, may it be in education, society, jobs, politics, justice and literature. The term 'Other' is as primitive as consciousness itself. This is what exactly Simone de Beauvoir depicted in *The Second Sex* (1949). Again, the significant writing of Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969) was an outstanding feminist writing, where the term "politics", indicates the mechanisms which express the relationships of power in the society.

Started in the European countries, feminism spread to every corner of the globe with its ideology and varieties. In literature, the feminist theory analyses the language of literature. The evolution of the feminism movement divided into three stages known as the First wave of Feminism, Second wave of feminism and Third wave of feminism. First wave of feminism which evolved in between 1830's to early 1900's talked about the fight of woman for equal contract and property rights legally. The second wave of Feminism which emerged in between 1960 to 1980, talked about the legal rights in workplace, reproductive rights, marital rape and domestic violence and the Third wave of Feminism started from 1990's till present time coined as "Micro politics" of gender equality.

Third wave of feminism breaks boundaries. It brings with it a number of sub-categories as it had to highlight the focus on queer and non-white women. Feminist theory examines the social roles, experience, interests, chores, and feminist politics of both men and women in a variety of fields. It covers the areas like Anthropology, Sociology, and communication, Psychoanalysis, Home Science, Economics, Literature, Education, Environment and Philosophy. Talking about environment or simply about nature, ecocriticism extended into a new literary theory 'Ecofeminism'. It relates the ecological degradation and oppression of

women in the hands of men and men-constructed-society emerged in 1960. Third wave feminism is the reweave of main stream feminism which bends towards the understanding of both the pain of nature and women in the era of colonization. The ongoing rise of capitalism and colonization forced their utmost power in suppressing the voice of the colonized, and hence categorised them as “other”, whose voice were either neglected or unheard. Ecofeminism is the amalgam of the experiences of the post -colonial feminism and third wave feminism, which derives the exposure of women’s life in this diversified social context. Third wave feminism, included the plea of women, children, other marginalised being along with the non-human species, those are victimised due to the unconditional devastation of environment by the patriarchal ideology.

However, the concept of Ecofeminism, has its beginning in the second wave feminism, asking the questions on the importance of feministic theory in the context of the third world countries or simply in the Non-western countries, which are affected by the ill effects of increasing globalisation. In the United States, during the second wave of feminism, women indulged in peace movements and environmental movements started to remark the interrelationship between environmental damage and its direct impacts on the lives of women and children. Ecofeminism is a product of the post-colonial effects, which opposed the unequal and exploitive economical discrepancy in the ‘Third World’ countries. As, Chandra Talpade Mohanty stated in her text *Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse*: ‘I would like to suggest that the feminist writings I analyse here discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world, thereby producing ,re-presenting a composite, singular "Third World Woman"-an image which appears arbitrarily constructed, but never- the less carries with it the authorizing signature of Western humanist discourse.’

(Boundary 2, Vol. 12, No. 3, On Humanism and the University I: The Discourse of Humanism. (Spring - Autumn, 1984))

In the main course of feminism, the condition of the non-western women was overlooked, which was shaped by the theory of ecofeminism whereas second wave of feminism worked for the recognition of women in race, class and position ; third wave of feminism came up with the transitional changes in the lives of women in third world countries due to the snowballing globalised economy and the projects which are termed as 'Maldevelopment' by Shiva. Depicting about the idea of 'Maldevelopment', Mary Mellor commented in her essay *Ecofeminist Thought* in such lines:

'Maldevelopment, for Shiva, has been created by the North's imperialist imposition of its model of modernity on the whole globe. The 'twin pillar' of this model are economic development and modern scientific knowledge. As a result, the world is becoming effectively a 'monoculture' with a consequent loss of diversity of plant and animal life and of people and culture (1993). At the heart of this development is violence, a violation of nature and women: 'this violence against nature and women is built into the very mode of perceiving both and forms the basis of the current development paradigm.'

(Mary Mellor, *Ecofeminist Thought, Feminism and Ecology*)

Francoise d'Eaubonne, a French writer coined 'Ecofeminism' in 1974 and she also influenced women to blow away the cobwebs in order to save the environment. Though during 1970s, there were no direct theory of ecofeminism, but there were different fields of schools who had started thinking about the co-relation between the domination of both nature and women. According to Francoise d'Eaubonne , there are two major threats for humanity in the present age, one is the over population and another is the environmental degradation and both are operated by patriarchy . However, the beginning of the study of the relationship between women and nature had started with three eminent American Feminist Philosophers naming,

Rosemary Reuther's book *New Earth- Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation* in 1975, Susan Griffin's book *Women and Nature-The Roaring Inside her* in 1978 and Carolyn Merchant's book *The Death of Nature - Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* in 1980. The real sense of writing was evolved in the mid to late 1980's by an eminent professor of Ecocriticism from Harvard University, Lawrence Buell in her book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, where she cites 'ecofeminism' as an epitome in the study of ecology and feminism in literary theory. However, ecological feminism neither belong to the second order of feminism nor to the Third order of feminism. Rather, it was present in various forms from the starting of the study of feminism in the nineteenth century, which was reflected in the works of women gardener, illustrators, botanists, animal rights and animal welfare advocates scientists and writers. Annette Kolodny, a feminist literary critic and activist, has dealt with the Ecofeministic approach in her two books named as *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* in 1975 and *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers 1630-1860* in 1984. In her book *The Lay of The Land*, she argues against the thought of defining Nature as a woman or as a mother. Some terms like "the rape of nature," "virgin land," and the pronouns like "she" and "her" which refer to nature, are purely biased and tricky in the context of Feminism. Again, she stresses on various themes here like 'literature authored by male' and naming land as a 'feminine gender'.

Ecofeminism has been a theory and movement largely voiced by activists like Karen Warren (United States) and Vandana Shiva (India). It is believed that ecofeminism has got its conceptual beginnings in the feminist theories of French. In 1952, Simone de Beauvoir revealed that in the patriarchal thought, both women and nature look as other. According to the theorists, overpopulation is the cause of excess births due to the exploitation of the female reproductive power; and this leads to the excess exploitation of natural resources. It is a threatening that human being cannot survive in the ecological consequences made by patriarchy. The inter-

relation between feminism and ecology was began in 1974 in North America, when Sandra Marburg and Lisa Watson voiced their eco-feminist concern in a conference at Berkeley whose title was Women and the Environment.

Karen J. Warren, a renowned author and scholar, along with the former Professor and also Chair of Philosophy at Macalester College, claims that "woman" and "nature" must not be understood as static or historical notions (contrary to the early essentialist ecofeminist writings), but rather as socially made by an androcentric and anthropocentric culture. Warren's *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters* (2000) and *Feminism and Ecology: Making connections*, illustrate key insights of ecological feminism in a philosophical perspective. In *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*, Warren raised her voice claiming that the philosophy of environmental study should extend its assumption towards the hardship of women, they suffer due to the environmental destruction. Hovering over the concept of 'Value Dualism' which says 'mind' stands for excellence and perfection and it is always superior to the 'body', Warren raised the alarm that this 'Value Dualism' is the main culprit behind the dual domination.

Like Warren, Vandana Shiva, as an anti-globalization author, plays a major role in the global ecofeminist movement. Focussed on the empowerment of women in agricultural and rural context, Vandana Shiva's feminist theory is titled as 'political', 'subsistence' and 'ecofeminism', to bring a difference from the spiritual based ecofeminism of western country. Ecofeminists boldly blame the 'Green Revolution' as the death of sustainable model of agriculture that women deal with in the process of agriculture. The scientific way of farming or the reductionist farming has distorted the practice of renewable process of agriculture which is specially maintained by the women. Maximisation from the agriculture that adds in the economic context of profit has devalued the fertility of soil and renewable sources of energy. At the other hand, it also minimises the recognition of women as the primary food supplier

who integrated forestry as well as animal husbandry with that of farming. Alfred Howard, an expert of sustainable farming in the modern era, focussed on the process of peasant farming and stated that, “The agricultural practices of the Orient have passed the supreme test – they are almost as permanent as those of the primeval forest, of the prairie, or of the ocean.” (A. Howard, *An Agricultural Testament*)

Vandana Shiva's thoughts of ecofeminism in agriculture is self-determined and absolute. She made the patriarchal ideology of scientific agriculture responsible which diminished the value of women and peasants who worked with the ecology, not against her. Women maintained a specific role in keeping the fertility of the soil safe by adding their traditional models of agricultural knowledge. Shiva states, ‘The woman peasants who works invisibly with the earth worm in building soil fertility has not been seen as doing ‘productive’ work or providing an ‘input’ to the food economy. We need to look beyond the mentality that tells us that fertility is ‘bought’ from fertilizer companies; we need to look beyond the fertilizer factory for maintaining soil fertility; and we need to reduce over the work of women and peasants who work with nature, nor against her.’ (Shiva, *Women in the Food Chain, Staying Alive*)

Shiva's works speak about the suffering of women in the ‘third world’ due to the forces of corporate globalization and colonialism. Her 13(thirteen) books expose the impact of globalization on the lives both of women and men in various developing countries. Vandana Shiva has opposed the concept of development from the perspective of patriarchy, in her article *Development as a New Project of Western Patriarchy* (1990). She explained the outcomes of these developmental projects that caused growing destitution, food uncertainty, financial disparity, environmental crisis, corruption in the daily lives of the people of the Third world countries. She states:

“The assumption was that western style progress was possible for all. Development, as the improved well-being of all, was thus equated with the westernisation of economic categories – of needs, of productivity, of growth. Concept and categories about economic development and natural resources utilisation that had emerged in the specific context of industrialisation and capitalist growth in a centre of colonial power, were raised to the level of universal assumptions and applicability in the entirely different context of basic needs satisfaction for the people of the newly independent Third World countries.”

(Vandana Shiva. Development, Ecology and Women, Staying Alive)

4.0. Conclusion:

The theory of ecofeminism has advocated for the possibilities and solutions for women empowerment and sustainable development in the post-colonial context. It made the world to realise how women have met with various unexpected life situations and how they cope with the environmental challenges.

Ecofeminism, however brought the map of survival trick with it. With the crucial discussion on the womanism in the context of ecology and feminism; the theory has led us to the fact of life. All women led environmental movements have brought the vision of healing the mother earth and uplifting human consciousness. The essence of life lies in the purity of the five elements, not the artificial symbol of industrialisation. Ruther Sidel has inscribed in her text, *Women and Children Last*, if the world economy crashes, then women and children will be the first victims of acute poverty than man. Ecofeminism, besides talking about feminism, has accepted all the imbedded notions of humanitarian acts by analysing the survival of the whole living beings, including soil, water and forest. The nature has the power of riving, but can it happen that human gets a new Earth? The complex theory has attempted to explain the interrelation of the subjugation of women, non-human and nature, and thus discarding the value

dualism. Ecofeminism has empowered the voice of the subaltern whose voice was unheard or neglected previously.

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